



Fig. 1: Locations of Sind Sparrow sightings along the Rajasthan Canal and the river Sutlej

The species was sighted again in Hanumangarh district at Badopal lake near Suratgarh on March 01, 2002. Eight males and five females were counted in two separate groups

on *Acacia tortilis* trees along the road. Two to three birds were observed picking food off the seed pods of the tree.

Apparently, the Sind Sparrow has had a restricted range since it was discovered, with only circumstantial evidence of even short distance migrations. It is a bird of tamarisk and *Acacia* scrub with tall grass or reeds along rivers, pools or marshes, invariably in close association with water (Clement *et al.* 1999). Although basically non-commensal, it has benefited from human activity. The extensive irrigation schemes undertaken after independence in 1947 have transformed the arid plains of the Punjab and Haryana. The lengthy canals, reservoirs and water bodies due to seepage from the canals have facilitated the species to colonise new areas.

The earliest records of the Sind Sparrow in the Indian Punjab are from the R. Sutlej side of Ludhiana, Phillaur and Ferozepur (Whistler 1911, 1913). A hitherto largely sedentary and localized species was first found in Haryana in 2001. The species successfully bred and was recorded from twelve sites in eastern Haryana and north Delhi during January-August, 2001 (Harvey and Sharma 2002).

Apart from the proximity of water, the major constant in the ecological requirement of Sind Sparrows appears to be the *Acacia nilotica* (Harvey and Sharma 2002). Circumstantially, the evidence is that the species has moved into northern Rajasthan recently along the Rajasthan Feeder Canal (Fig. 1). The canal starting from Harike, Punjab evidently provided the known ecological requirements for the species to expand its range. What other factors have helped the species to colonise new areas is not known yet, but it is clearly on the move.

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### 3. SIGHTING OF INDIAN SKIMMER *RYNCHOPS ALBICOLLIS* (SWAINSON) IN THE PURBASTHALI-GANGES ISLETS, BURDWAN DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL<sup>1</sup>

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The globally threatened Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* has a large range with an estimated global 'Extent

of Occurrence' of 2,52,000 sq. km. It has a global population estimated to be 6,000-10,000 individuals (Wetlands

International 2002). This species is listed as Vulnerable (Birdlife International 2007) because its population is undergoing a rapid decline as a result of widespread degradation and disturbance of lowland rivers and lakes. The Indian Skimmer is confined to Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. A large proportion of the population of this species winters in Bangladesh, principally in the Padma-Meghna delta, and Myanmar. It is a rare visitor to Nepal. It was formerly widely distributed across the Indian subcontinent, along the major rivers of Myanmar, and along the Mekong in Indo-China. In India its distribution range is mainly confined to the River Ganga. It has declined in India and Pakistan (Birdlife International 2007). As per the published account, from West Bengal it has been recorded from the Buxa Tiger Reserve (Allen *et al.* 1996) in the Jalpaiguri district, from the Farakka Barrage in the Malda district (Jha 2006; Sharma 2001) and from the Chattaranjan Bara Dam in the Burdwan district on January 30, 2003 where nine individuals were recorded (Bombay Natural History Society 2007).

From January 26-28, 2007, I went to Purbasthali-Ganga Islets for a survey on waterbirds. The Purbasthali-Ganga Islets situated in the Burdwan district is adjacent to Nadia district in West Bengal. The vast riverine tract of Purbasthali is located close to Kasthashali in Chupi Char along River

Ganga. This wetland complex is actually a cluster of riverine isles, ox-bow lakes and river channels. A large number of migratory waterbirds, especially waterfowl are found here.

As the Indian Skimmer is a Vulnerable species, here I give recent sight records. On January 26, 2007 at 1220 hrs I noticed four Indian Skimmers resting along the riverbank at the Nidoya Char. Further upstream of the river at 1345 hrs two individuals were sighted hovering above the waterline at the Rajar Char. On January 27, 2007 at 1150 hrs two individuals of this species were sighted at the same spot at the Nidoya Char. On the same day at 1410 hrs at the Rajar Char a group of four individuals was sighted on the riverbank side. On January 28, 2007 at 1215 hrs a group of six individuals was sighted at Nidoya Char. It appears that the Nidoya Char is a suitable foraging ground for this species, as this species was sighted only here everyday.

The Purbasthali-Ganga Islets is an unexplored waterbird habitat of West Bengal. It is estimated that the Purbasthali-Ganga Islets support at least 72 species of waterbirds and are ranked as a top priority list to be designated as a Ramsar Site (Vijayan *et al.* 2004). Recently, I recorded 101 species of waterbirds from the Purbasthali-Ganga Islets (Sharma 2007). It was found that this wetland area is suitable for Indian Skimmers also, where it may occur regularly.

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4. FIRST RECORD OF CASPIAN GULLS *LARUS CACHINNANS* IN THE INDIAN SUNDERBANS DELTA<sup>1</sup>

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On January 24, 2005, we approached Halliday Island Sanctuary, located at the extreme end of the Indian Sunderbans delta near the Bay of Bengal coastline, which is a part of the Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve, to look for waders. The

survey was a part of an international ornithological expedition looking for the globally threatened Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* (Zöckler *et al.* 2005). The Island is situated south-east of Kolkata in South 24 Parganas district,